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THE BREMENTOWN MUSICIANS

Libretto by Marcy Telles

Onstage is a "scroll" on which the scenery can be wound to make it appear that the characters are "traveling." The ends of the scroll can be concealed behind two trees.

Lines intended to be sung are printed in italics. Any offstage actor can wind the scroll.

The donkey enters from stage right, with his head hanging low. A sad-looking cat enters from stage left, as noted in score.

Donkey:

Hee haw! Hee haw. My feet are sore!

Cat:

Meow! Meow! I'm all worn out!

Donkey:

Good morrow

Cat:

Good morrow

Donkey:

Do you travel on this way?

Cat:

I hardly know

Which way to go

It's been a rotten day.

Donkey:

Too true! Too true!

I feel the same as you!

Cat:

You do? You do?

Tell me why, I pray.

The Donkey's Aria:

Alas! Alas!

I had a cruel master

Just when I hoped for pasture

I found myself outcast!

I hauled, I plowed

I was polite to cows

When the men had bread and chowder

I lived on weeds and grass

I make

mistakes

But never a complaint

And now that I am sway-backed

They threaten me with glue factories!

Oh woe, oh woe, oh woe is me!

Cat:

That is a sorry tale

(The donkey looks offended and swishes his tail)

I mean the one you told

They need you when you're young

But not when you are old

Donkey:

Too true! Too true!

And what, my friend, of you?

The Cat's Aria:

I was a mouser

In a great house, sir

I dined upon sardines

And bowls of purest cream

Of course, I earned my pay

I caught 12 mice a day

But lately I prefer

To simply sit and purr

My mistress told me that

I had grown old and fat

I mumbled in my fur

That I could say the same of her!

Donkey:

Oh what a business!

Oh, what a cruel mistress!

Don't leave me in suspense

How does your story end?

Cat:

*I will not pussyfoot around
She told the boy I should be drowned*

Donkey and Cat:

*Drowned! Drowned!
A fate not fit for fur, we've found!
Drowned! Drowned!*

Cat:

*I dared not hang around.
So with a flicker of my tail
I hit the dusty trail*

Donkey:

Oh, with a flicker of your tail

Cat:

Oh, with a flicker of my tail

Donkey and Cat:

The dusty, dusty trail

Donkey:

Well. Here we are then. On the road to...

Cat:

Bremen, I think. I saw a sign a while back.

Donkey:

What do you plan to do in Bremen, Cat? How will you earn your milk?

Cat:

I have given that a great deal of thought.

Donkey:

And?

Cat:

I shall sing.

Donkey:

Sing?

Cat:

Why not? I have a lovely voice. And loud, too.

Donkey:

Of course you are allowed. Everyone is allowed to sing. There is no law against it, I think.

Cat:

Loud! I sing loud.

Donkey:

Yes, I see clouds as well. Think it will rain?

Cat:

(Shouting) I said I sing...(whispering) almost as well as you do.

Donkey:

Ah! Now I hear you clear as a bell. So you plan to be a singer? Why shouldn't I sing as well? I have a very beautiful voice. I know it for a fact. For when I sing, all the birds fly high up into the sky to listen to me. High, high up in the sky.

Cat:

When I sing, the neighbors throw tributes at my feet.

Donkey:

They throw thick boots, you say?

Cat:

Tributes! That is to say, presents. Gifts. Well, sometimes they do throw boots, actually.

Dog:

So they throw boots at your feet, eh?

Cat:

Yes. (She preens) Although sometimes they hit me in the head.

Donkey:

Well, they can't help it, if their aim is bad.

Cat:

So we shall both be singers, then. What if we were to travel together, you and I, and become a pair of singing troubadours?

Donkey:

Two-by-fours?

Cat:

Troubadours!

Donkey:

Oh! Through the door! What door?

Cat:

I said (she gathers her strength to shout in his ear) We could sing together!

Donkey:

Sing together! Why didn't you say so? I think that is an excellent idea!

Act 1, Scene 2

They begin singing and mime walking as the scroll turns to indicate that they are moving on.

Donkey and Cat:

Well met, well met!

We'll make a fine duet!

I can sing soprano

And I the bass profundo

We'll make the finest music that the world's heard yet!

The dog enters.

Dog:

Bow wow woe is me!

Donkey and Cat:

Good morrow

Dog:

Good morrow

Donkey and Cat:

Do you travel on this way?

Dog:

I hardly know

Which way to go

It's been a blasted day.

Donkey and Cat:

Tell us why, we pray.

The Dog's Aria:

I hunted with the pack,

Uphill and down

The shire line and back

All the year around

Sleeping in the frosty yard

*Baying at the moon
Stalwart, faithful, battle-scarred
And what, I ask, was my reward?
Scolded, whipped, and then discarded
Like a worn-out shoe*

Donkey, Cat, and Dog:
*Spurned! Spurned!
A lonely, listless life, we've learned!
Spurned! Spurned!*

Dog:
*So on my heel I turned.
And with a flicker of my tail
I hit the dusty trail*

Donkey and Cat:
Oh, with a flicker of your tail

Dog:
Oh, with a flicker of my tail

Donkey and Cat:
The dusty, dusty trail

Cat:
What a sad end!

Dog: (looking at tail)
Oh, I don't know. It's still good for a wag or two.

Cat:
I mean your story.

Dog:
Yes - a sad end indeed for a hunting dog like me.

Donkey:
Surely your story isn't ended yet! Here you are, after all. And where shall you go from here?

Dog:
I have no idea. I can't go back to my old home - they'd only throw me out again. I suppose I must keep going down this road. Oh, woe, oh woe. (She begins to bay)

Cat:
Why, you have a lovely singing voice, too!

Donkey:
What tone! What timbre!

Cat:
We need someone to sing alto in our singing group, don't you think?

Donkey:
Pal Joe? Who is "Pal Joe?"

Cat:
Alto! Someone to sing inbetween the bass and the soprano. Not real high and not real low.

Dog:
I don't understand.

Donkey:
Well it's no wonder. That cat keeps whispering something about "Pal Joe!" Before she wanted me to go through a door - and there was no door in sight! She's pretty, but she's strange.

Cat: (to the Dog)
I hope your ears are better than those useless appendages on our friend the donkey.

Donkey:
Appendixes?

Cat:
After a great deal of thought, we've decided to follow this road to the town of Bremen...

Donkey:
A bandage is?

Cat:
...There to earn our keep as musicians. We thought you might like to join us.

Donkey:
Our friend and his?

Cat:
Appendages! Things that are stuck on and stick out - like your ears!

Donkey:
No need to shout. I can hear perfectly well, you know.

Cat:
I was asking our new friend if she'd like to join us as an alto, er, another musician.

Dog:

Musicians! What an excellent idea! Musicians! I *love* it!

Act 1, Scene 3

They begin singing and walking as the scroll turns to indicate that they are moving on.

Donkey, Cat and Dog:

Well met, well met!

A fine triumvirate!

The cat can sing soprano

The hound a grand contralto

And I the bass profundo

We'll make the finest music that the world's heard yet!

The rooster enters.

Rooster:

Oh rrr-rrr-rrr rotten day! Oh, what shall I doodle do?

Donkey, Dog, and Cat:

Good morrow

Rooster:

Good morrow

Donkey, Dog, and Cat:

Do you travel on this way?

Rooster:

I hardly know

Which way to go

I feel so declassé.

Donkey, Dog, and Cat:

Tell us why, we pray.

The Rooster's Aria:

For year's I crowed the light

And sang away the night

Awake, awake, the time is now

Come feed the chickens, milk the cow!

Without my brave alarm

Who knows what might befall the farm

Donkey:

What happened, then, to close your beak?

Rooster:

*A thing of which no one should speak:
Last night I saw the wretched old cook
Consulting in her recipe book
It makes my bright comb droop -
She planned to make me into soup.*

Donkey, Cat, Rooster, and Dog:

*Soup! Soup!
How sad that some so low should stoop!
Soup! Soup!*

Rooster:

*My friends, I flew the coop.
And with a flicker of my tail
I hit the dusty trail*

Donkey and Cat:

Oh, with a flicker of your tail

Rooster:

Oh, with a flicker of my tail

Donkey and Cat:

The dusty, dusty trail

Act 1, Scene 4

Dog:

The rooster has such a fine tenor voice - couldn't he join us as well?

Cat:

Why not?

Rooster:

I would gladly join you, mes amis - where are you going?

Dog:

Oh, we have a wonderful plan! You'll *love* it! We're going to...er... where are we going again?

Cat:

After much thought, we've decided to go to Brementown, to be troubadours.

Donkey:

Shoot the boars?

Cat:

We could be a quartet, if you'll be our fourth?

Rooster:
I'm game!

Donkey:
True or false?

Cat:
Troubadours! Singers!

Donkey:
Why on earth didn't you say so?

Cat:
Well met, well met!
Now we are a quartet!
We'll turn our sad reversals into a victory.
Let's have our first rehearsal
Beneath this shady tree.

All four animals:
Well met! Well met!
A fine, a fine quartet
We'll make the finest music that the world's heard yet!

Donkey:
Now on to the big question -
What shall we all sing?
Who has a suggestion?
Any little thing.

Dog:
Some lovely songs were sung
While out upon the hunt
A certain type of music that was pleasing to my ear
If we need a canticle
What about a madrigal?
How lucky that I happen to have one right here

Act 1, Scene 5
(She hands out music and they sing)

Quick as a flash
The fox does dash
Into the stream with a delicate splash
Underneath the hedge
Through the flowerbed
Sniffing the air, I catch his scent

*My nose
knows
Sifting aromas, diagnose My nose
knows
Which way he goes.*

*Faster than light
The fox takes flight
Into a hollow tree, just out of sight
In and out of trees
Silently he flees
I find him swiftly in the breeze*

*My nose
knows
Sifting aromas, diagnose
My nose
knows
Which way he goes.*

Act 1, Scene 6

*Cat:
A madrigal - how English!
How formal and restrained
I have a song to sing which
Has passion and some strength
So while we are at it
Let's be operatic
Here is the music - what do you say?*

(She hands out the music and begins to sing. The others page ahead, examining the score, looking for their entrances and taking deep breaths, as though about to start, but in fact, the piece is a solo for the cat.)

*Mice, mice, ever so nice
Soft little morsels, all crunchy inside
Mice, mice
Sugar and spice
Cannot improve on the flavor of mice!*

*First you must catch 'em
Slither and pounce
Then you can bat them
Once round the house
Velvet your paws
Don't show your claws
As you cavort and skediddle and bounce*

*Mice, mice, I'll say it twice
More fun than any old wind-up device
Mice, mice
I'd pay any price
Just to enjoy the sweet savor of mice*

Cat:

What say you? Isn't that a mouseterpiece? I think I shall call it my Magnificat!

Dog:

*I must confess that, overall
Your song sounds like a caterwaul.*

Rooster:

*When it comes to opera
I respond comme ci, comme ca.*

Donkey:

*Though I don't have advanced degrees
I have to say that I agree.*

Rooster:

I don't know about these songs - They seem so cruel! First the poor fox is chased round the fields and now the poor mouse is (he draws a finger across his throat).

Dog:

Oh, I always let the fox go of course. We're old friends.

Rooster:

That's very game of you. What about the mouse?

They all look at the cat, who shrugs.

Act 1, Scene 7

Donkey:

*Let's put another song to the test
Do we have any more requests?*

Rooster:

*We have so much to learn
So I think, for my turn
I'll try an educational exercise
Structured, instructive, cultured, productive
A simple little canon we can concertize
(He hands out music and they sing)*

*If you would be troubadours,
You must learn the rules
Do you want encores
Or a chorus of boos?
Discipline is key
So if we
Are to all succeed
Learn to follow me!
Learn to follow me!*
(Between verses-bars 33, 43, 53, and 62, the rooster enjoins the cat to follow closer and the cat indicates that she is getting as close as she can)

Cat: (sarcastic)

Oh, that's very instructive. It certainly tells us something about you. Why, you're the last to arrive and already you want to be our leader!

Rooster:

Not at all, not at all. It is not my composition - my wife wrote the lyrics.

Donkey:

Rear itch? (He scratches his behind)

Rooster:

Lyrics! The words to the song!

Donkey:

The words were fine. They didn't make my lips stick.

Rooster:

Why, they are magnifique!

Donkey:

Muddy feet? My feet are clean, but they're very tired.

Dog:

Dog tired.

Cat:

And friends, I fear we shall not reach Bremen today. Look - already the sun is getting low in the sky.

Cat:

Singing is hard work. I want a catnap.

Dog:

Yes, I could use forty winks myself.

Rooster:
A roost would sure give me a boost.

Donkey: (pointing off stage)
Look! There's a little cottage just ahead. Where there is a house, there is grass.

Dog:
And table-scraps!

Rooster:
And breadcrumbs!

Cat:
And cream!

Donkey:
A stream? Well, I don't see one - but maybe your eyes are better than mine.
(End of Act 1)

Act 2, Scene 1

Lights come down briefly and a house is moved onto the stage. We see the exterior of the house with a large open window and a large door. A sign on the house reads, "Robbers' Hideout." A curtain at the window creates a screen through which we will see silhouettes, like a puppet stage.

Dog: (Jumping towards the window)
I can't see! I can't see!

Donkey:
Patience, hound. (He puts his head through the curtain and whispers back to the others)
Hmm - a big table, spread with food and drink. There are some humans sitting around it, talking. They seem quite excited.

Cat:
What kind of food?

Dog:
Don't you think about anything but your stomach? What are they saying? Who are they?

Donkey:
Something about a heist. What's a heist?

Rooster:
It's taller than a low-st, I would guess.

Cat:
A heist is a crime! You must have heard wrong. What are they saying now?

Donkey:

They're pulling a job in town tonight. How do you pull a job? I know how to pull a cart - but a job?

Dog:

I pulled a muscle once.

Cat:

What about the food?

Donkey:

They have everything you can imagine. There's a gigantic trout, stuffed with crabmeat...

(The cat expresses great enthusiasm. She takes a napkin from her knapsack and ties it around her neck.)

...and a huge bowl of rice...

(The rooster flaps excitedly and paws the ground)

...and a platter filled with meat...

(The dog leaps with joy and pants)

...mmm that salad looks awfully good to me...

Dog:

I love it! Let's go in! Let's go in!

Cat:

We haven't been invited. And what if they really are robbers? It could be trouble.

Donkey:

We don't know that for sure.

Dog:

And if they are robbers, at least they'll have enough to pay us.

Donkey:

Well, if we're going to make our living as musicians, we may as well begin now.

Rooster:

I'm game - let us sing for our supper.

They sing:

Greetings to you,

We sing one and all

Cock-a-doodle-doo

Hee haw, hee haw

*In any language, bird or beast
We can sweet music make
If you invite us to your feast
We'll gladly serenade*

*Greetings to you,
We sing soft and loud
Meow, meow
Bow-wow, bow-wow*

*In any language, fowl or fish
We strive to entertain
If you'll but fill our dinner dish
We'll sing a sweet refrain*

*Cock-a-doodle do
Hee haw, hee haw
Meow, fft, fft, fft
Bow-wow, howl*

At the end of the song, they bray, crow, yowl, and howl, each according to his or her lights. Inside, the lights create a sense of panic.

Rooster:
Ecoutez! I hear a loud noise - was that applause?

Donkey:
They're hurting my ears! I wish they *would* pause!

Dog (jumping at the window):
Well, do you think they liked our performance?

Donkey:
I don't know - I can't see them.

Cat:
Can you see the food?

Donkey: (moving over to the window)
The food is still there, but some of it is on the floor and the house is very dark. I can't tell what's going on.

Rooster:
Perhaps this is their way of inviting us to dine. How thoughtful of them to notice that some of us are too short to reach the table and place some food on the floor.

Dog:

Of course! Customs vary from town to town, I've heard.

Cat:

Custom or no custom, I'm hungry. (She opens the door and walks in, cautiously at first, then boldly, inviting the others to join her. The interior remains dark and we cannot see the animals once they enter.)

(A melee ensues. We hear the voices of the animals and the robbers from within. The actors should be exchanging their costumes to the robber outfits and the first one to finish should enter stealthily from the wings as the fight continues. The following dialog is heard as the fight goes on:)

Sal:

I've got him! Woah - he's got me

Dog:

Bow wow! Bow wow! I'll bite your snout!

Jesse:

Quit kickin' me Sal - where'd you get such hard boots?

Donkey:

Hee haw! Hee Haw! Let go of my jaw!

Frank:

It's definitely a monster! Nothing has claws like this!

Cat:

Meow! Meow! I'll scratch you now!

Jo:

Get that thing out of my face! I can't breathe!

Rooster:

Cock-a-doodle-do! I flap at you!

Act 2, Scene 2

Two robbers stumble onto the stage and hold the door closed behind them to prevent anything following them.

Robber 1:

What in the world was that? Did the cops find out that we're planning a job tonight?

Robber 2:

They didn't look like cops to me! And we're holding up the bank two towns over! Not to mention that we haven't even done anything yet! Boy, I thought I'd never squeeze out that back window!

Robber 1:

Well, I keep tellin ya to lose some weight. I could swear I saw one of them-whaddyacallit-dinosaurs.

Robber 2:

Dinosaur! Who ever heard of a dinosaur with feathers!

Robber 3:

I didn't see no feathers! But I sure felt a pair of brass knuckles - and they was the size of horse's hooves!

Robber 1:

What if was just one big animal...

Robber 2:

What kind of animal has feathers and hooves and fur and...

Robber 3:

It sounds like a - monster (he looks around nervously)

Robber 1:

Well, if it was a monster, we better find him and get rid of him.

Robber 2:

I've searched the whole area and there's no sign of anybody!

Robber 3:

Whoever it was - or whatever it was - we probably frightened him away!

Robber 2:

By running in the opposite direction?

Robber 4:

Yeah! I bet that was a tactic he didn't expect!

(As they sing, one robber at a time makes his surreptitious escape:)

No one is braver than we, we say

Who else could frighten that beast away?

Did you see his claws?

Sharp as a sword!

Did you hear his voice?

Like the North Wind it roared!

He was big as a mountain and strong as a bear

I've never seen anything like him, nowhere!

I could tell in the dark

*Though it **was** dark as pitch*

He was fierce as a shark

A monster! A witch!

*Lucky for him that we weren't armed
Fortunate that he escaped unharmed!
I could have shown him
Ready to leap!
In just one more moment
He'd be dead meat*

*He was big as a mountain and strong as a bear
I've never seen anything like him, nowhere!
I could tell in the dark
Though it was dark as pitch
He was fierce as a shark
A monster! A witch!*

*Now we are back and we're here to fight
With the advantage of (pause) surprise
We're ready to brawl
We'll make him crawl!
The battle is on!*
[pause, as the last robber looks around cautiously, then whispers:]
Do you think he's gone?

Last robber:
Whoa - *everybody's* gone!

He grabs the sign on the house and exits.

(End of Act 2)

Act 3, Scene 1

The house is still on stage, but otherwise the stage is empty. The door slowly opens and the donkey comes out.

Donkey:
Okay - the coast is clear.

Cat:
How can you be sure?

Donkey:
I've become something of an expert on the subject of robbers.

Cat:
You sure did a good job back there!

Donkey:
You were very impressive yourself. I've never seen anyone use her claws to better effect.

(He tries "clawing")

Cat:

No - more like this - it's all in the wrist...

Donkey:

It must be genetic.

Cat:

Well, when one doesn't have hooves...(she tries kicking)

Donkey:

Give it a little more oomph - from here...(he demonstrates)

Cat:

I don't think I'll give up my claws just yet.

Donkey:

How brave we were!

Cat:

How clever!

Dog (entering):

Yeah!

Rooster (entering):

How game!

Cat:

I've been thinking...

Donkey:

Shrinking? You look the same size to me.

Cat:

Thinking! About Bremen, I mean. I'm sure it's a wonderful place...

Dog:

But not, perhaps the *most* wonderful place.

Rooster:

Not as wonderful as our game little house.

Donkey:

The house we defended with our lives!

Cat:

Why should we not live right here and sing through our golden days together in the sun?

Donkey:

On the run?

Rooster:

Sun! Sun!

Donkey:

Father?

Rooster:

Not that kind of sun!

Cat: (Shouting in the donkey's ear)

We're going to stay here and sing!

Donkey:

Ah! Good idea!

Act 3, Scene 2

Dog:

Well, what *shall* we sing? Hmmm.

Rooster:

My, my, my

Donkey:

Um, hum.

(These musings develop into an "improvisational" jazz piece)

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